

Public Conference Call
Recommended Wilderness, Backcountry Areas,
Wildlife Corridors & Designated Routes
July 13, 2016

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Peter Fargo: Welcome, everybody. This is Peter Fargo with the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team and this is our public update on the Blue Mountains Forest Plans. It's the second in a series of calls following our newsletters. We just recently released a newsletter in June and we would like to have a chance to go over that newsletter with everybody and answer questions that have rolled in over the past couple weeks.

So that is basically our agenda. Just a few logistics before we dive in. It's possible to have up to 250 people on this line and because of that and the potential for espresso machines in the background, dogs barking, et cetera, we just thought it would be easier to have a one way broadcast. We're going to be recording this call. So if folks want to listen to it down the road or share it with others, or if you know people who weren't able to attend, they can have a chance to listen in as well.

Even though we are the only speakers on this call, we're still hoping that we can have an interaction session and that will come in two forms. We had people submit questions in advance and we'll be responding to those topic by topic. Same topics that were covered in the June newsletter. And also, if you have questions, clarifications come up in real time, feel free to send an email. Please keep your question brief, to the point, and we'll do our best, if time allows, to address it at a few breaks during the call. So the email is bluemtnplanrevision@fs.fed.us. And to spell that out, that's B-L-U-E-M-T-N, Plan Revision, R-E-V-I-S-I-O-N, at fs.fed.us. So we look forward to your clarifications and questions there.

And just to set some expectations, we won't be able to answer every question that we've received in advance, but we'll do our best. Some questions have some overlap and we'll be

able to address two at once in some cases. And although we won't be able to answer all the questions, we will be having more calls like this and we will be issuing additional newsletters. And so we'll look to answer your questions during those opportunities.

Just to keep in mind, the newsletter covers a number of staff recommendations. As we proceed towards final Forest Plans, we are under construction and we want to share as much as we can with you as we develop these final plans. And so we have shared what the staff have recommended to the Forest Supervisors and to the Regional Forester, but there are no final decisions yet. It's still a work in progress. So please keep in mind that fact.

So we're going to move into our agenda here and Sabrina is going to kick us off. But first, I want to do a round of introductions in the room and we'll start with Steve Beverlin and then we'll go around the room.

Steve Beverlin: Hello, everybody. This is Steve Beverlin. I'm the Forest Supervisor on the Malheur National Forest.

Sabrina Stadler: Hi, Sabrina Stadler, Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Team Leader.

Dennis Dougherty: Hi, everyone. I'm Dennis Dougherty, the Recreation Planner on the Plan Revision Team.

Mike Stearly: Good evening, everybody. This is Mike Stearly, Public Affairs Specialist, Malheur National Forest.

Peter Fargo: And Peter Fargo, Public Affairs on the Blue Mountains Forest Plans and I'll be facilitating our call for the next hour. So Sabrina, would you kick us off with a discussion of the status of the Forest Plans and the current timeline?

Sabrina Stadler: Yes. So people are kind of wondering where we're at with that, where we are with getting a final EIS and plans out. And right now, are in the finalizing stages. We've been looking at all the public comments and coming to, as you've probably seen through our newsletters, some ideas of what we would like to see go forward from what we've read and heard in our public engagement meetings.

And so we're honing in on that and within the next few months, we should be getting our final EIS, Environmental Impact Statement, Plans and draft Records of Decision to the Regional Office for review. And then from there, we'll be finalizing and going out to the public. But meanwhile, on a separate track, we're trying to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service to get a Biological Opinion, which we need to have in order to go out with our final.

So at this point in time, there's kind of a push pull to get that to coincide and we hope to have something to the public by early next year. We'll be then going through an objection process. There will be a 60 day objection period for people to file objections and then we'll have some portion of time to resolve those objections. So we won't have a final Record of Decision until after that. So that will probably get us into the next calendar year, middle of the year or so.

So that's where we're sort of headed right now. Things are changing as we speak sometimes. So maybe I'll have something different to say next time we meet, but that's where we're at currently.

Peter Fargo: Sabrina, we had one question that came in that's related to what you just said and that is will the public have an opportunity to review the two new Alternatives that we announced in the April newsletter?

Sabrina Stadler: That's correct. Yes, so at this time, there will be an opportunity to object based on what they see in the Alternatives. But we are basically working through what we heard and the comments we heard, and putting together what we think the agency would like to go forward with. And people will have a chance to object us on any new material that wasn't in there, or if they had previous comments that we didn't address, they can object us on that. And it will be up to the Chief of the Forest Service to decide who has standing in the objection process. So they will be submitting their objection letters and then the Washington Office will make the decision on who they bring forward in the objection process. And then those folks will have opportunities to meet with the Washington Office Staff and try to come to some resolutions.

So that'll be a process that is unfolding as we get through that objection process.

Peter Fargo: Great. Thanks for the update. So next, we wanted to hear from Steve Beverlin about the June newsletter and the content highlights there. And Steve, I'll pass it onto you, but just wanted to say that we issued this newsletter. This is the second in a series of newsletters that we intend to issue. The first one in April caught people up with where the Forest Plan revision process is and this is really unprecedented as far as we're aware in the Forest Planning world to give folks more of a transparent window into what we are doing between the comment periods, and the draft, and the final.

And so this is part of our effort to make sure everybody is in the loop and aware of how we're moving towards that goal.

Steve Beverlin: Thanks, Peter. So I don't know if everybody has this on their computers or in a hard copy they printed off. I'll try to hit the high points of the June newsletter here. It talks about four specific areas, recommended wilderness, our backcountry areas, wildlife corridors, and then designated routes. So those four specific areas. And as we go through the discussion today answering the questions, we'll answer a question from each of those four topic areas in order, and then start again and answer the next series of questions for each one.

So that's kind of -- we didn't want to answer all the questions for one at a specific time because we may leave some out. So trying to be equitable there. So our June newsletter basically builds off the April newsletter, which announced that we're analyzing two new Alternatives in the EIS. So we did that based on public comment, and concerns, and issues that we heard. And this June newsletter then, the four topics again, recommended wilderness I'll touch on first. So really, the biggest change in recommended wilderness across the plans is that the Vinegar Hill/Indian Rock Scenic Area, which was proposed to be recommended wilderness in our existing Alternatives, in the new Alternatives it is not proposed to be so.

So the staff reevaluated the area and found that it had some conflicting uses, which didn't fit the wildlife criteria or the wilderness criteria. Sorry about that. In particular, mining claims existed and then the significant over-the-snow vehicle use that occurs up there. So in the two new Alternatives, it's not recommended to be wilderness, the Vinegar Hill/Indian Rock Scenic Area. And in the remainder of the Alternatives, it is to be.

So the next topic area is backcountry areas. So there's two types of backcountry areas in the EIS, motorized and non-motorized. And generally, those backcountry areas overlap with our Inventoried Roadless Areas. And throughout the Forest Plan process, we don't have the ability to change those Inventoried Roadless Areas. They're fixed. So what we're trying to do is make certain that the backcountry areas, motorized and non-motorized, are manageable and fit the situation on the ground. So the staff -- an ID (interdisciplinary) team went through a review, and looked at those, and made some modifications and fine tunings of those boundaries. We tried to align the backcountry management area boundaries in the Forest Plan to the inventory roadless area boundaries as close as we could. Sometimes it doesn't really fit. Sometimes there's backcountry non-motorized areas that extend outside from the inventory roadless. Sometimes there aren't. So we just took a hard look at that and we'll talk some more about that in some of the questions.

The third topic that the June newsletter talks about are wildlife corridors. So there were some wildlife corridors identified in the plan for the Umatilla and the Wallowa-Whitman Forest. None were identified on the Malheur. And after further consideration, the ID team really they're not recommending wildlife corridors. Again, just in the two new Alternatives, they'll exist in the remainder -- the existing Alternatives because when we, again, took a harder look at the -- on the characteristics that existed in the proposed wildlife corridors, they really didn't fit. So because of road densities and other issues. And we believe that that issue, the wildlife issue and connectivity issue, will be addressed in the project planning specific analysis that we undergo. And so the wildlife biologist cadre across the three Forests are working to help ensure that we have the right information in the plan to make that clear.

So the fourth topic is part of a broader topic that's been somewhat controversial, designated routes, Travel Management planning in the Forest Plan revision. So -- and I'll get into this a little later in some of the answering to some of the questions that Travel Management planning has not been completed on the Wallowa-Whitman or the Malheur National Forest in terms of Subpart B analysis, which is designation of roads, trails, and areas for motorized use. So the term designated routes actually is part of the Travel Management rule and since we haven't completed the two Forests, the Wallowa-Whitman and Malheur, haven't completed that Subpart B of the Travel Management rule and officially designated routes, we took that out of the Forest Plan and for those two new Alternatives. Well, maybe it's across all the Alternatives now. We're not really utilizing that term anymore.

We are stating that we are required to manage roads, trails, and areas consistent with law of policy and regulation. So -- and also, to maybe soothe some concerns, we're also continuing to analyze routes and access in site-specific projects across the three Forests too. So that's kind of those four main topic areas in the June newsletter. Pretty high overview. I made summaries. One other important part that folks may want to pay attention to. There's a full page that talks about management areas in the plan revision. There's -- wow, I don't know -- two, four, six, eight, ten, yes, about twenty some different management areas across the three Forests. And we use those to basically kind of allocate suitable and non-suitable uses across the Forests to specific pieces and parts of the landscape.

So that's a pretty good primer on that and there's about as much detail as you want on the other four topics. I encourage you to read that June newsletter. And again, as Peter stated, it's really our intent to try to keep everybody up to speed on where we're at, try not to go dark, and have everybody question what we're doing, and -- of if we're doing anything. So that's our intent of having this call and sending the newsletters out.

Peter Fargo: Thank you, Steve. So we'll move into the question and answer phase of the meeting now. And as Steve mentioned, we'll go topic by topic based on the topics covered in the newsletter. And the first one covered in the newsletter is wilderness. And this is a question that we are directing to Dennis Dougherty here in the room. Can the Forest Service preserve large areas for non-motorized use to provide quite natural spaces and limit impacts to the quality of hunting, camping, hiking, fishing, et cetera?

Dennis Dougherty: And the short answer is yes, that is what the Forest has done through a multiple different mechanisms and statutes through its history is conserving those large -- preserving those large areas. The first one, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule in 2001, that actually designated over 58 million acres in kind of that preserved conservation type status. Additionally, Congress has done that for the agencies and designated nearly 110 million acres nationally as wilderness.

So if you distill that down to our planning effort locally here in the Blues, you know, the Forest team recognized that these combined areas of inventoried wilderness areas and designated wilderness, along with other backcountry areas, some of those management areas

Steve referenced, really contribute to that broader natural resource conservation effort, and certainly contributes significantly to the primitive recreation opportunities that the Forest can offer, including the list that Peter mentioned, the hunting, camping, hiking, backcountry skiing, backcountry packing. So it really does promote that remote primitive recreation opportunity and the Forest has done so for decades and conserved those areas.

Peter Fargo: Thank you.

Dennis Dougherty: You bet.

Peter Fargo: So the second question in that wilderness category is related. So I'd like to dive into that question too just so we stay on the same wavelength. And this will be a question for Steve. In the Vinegar Hill and Indian Rock Scenic Area, can the Forest Service change the uses that conflict with wilderness character so that the recommended wilderness designation can be preserved? What about in some areas such that a portion of the recommendation can be maintained? In other words, are there some areas of the scenic area where there could be a wilderness designation?

Steve Beverlin: Thanks, Peter. The short answer is yes, we could modify or just designate certain pieces and parts of that area. Again, the spectrum of Alternatives that we have analyzed designated -- recommended as wilderness the Vinegar Hill and Indian Rock Area and don't. So there's a whole spectrum that the Regional Forester can choose those Alternatives depending on where he lands on his final run. It's rather difficult because of some of the mining claims up there to actually kind of cherry stem some of those or just have wilderness surround them just because of where they lay on the landscape. So that's difficult.

That would be difficult to change. The easier portion may be prohibiting over-the-snow vehicle use up there. We could make that prohibition. Obviously, some folks would strongly desire us not to do so and other folks may desire us to do so. So again, the spectrum of Alternatives is going to allow the Regional Forester to make that determination.

Peter Fargo: Thanks. So that brings us to the second category, which is backcountry and Inventoried Roadless Areas. And this will be another question for Dennis. What is the distinction

between the recommended wilderness areas listed as MA1B and the backcountry areas, MA3A and 3B?

Dennis Dougherty: Sure, and there are distinctions that are laid out within the plan how we distinguish between these areas. But it still was lost to some extent that there seemed to be confusion in thinking that our backcountry areas are really de facto wilderness areas. So we prepared a lot of material in other FAQs that we tried to build the distinction between those two types of areas. And really, the main distinctions within those backcountry areas, you know, obviously, we can have mechanical and motorized use within them along with other structural improvements, actual structures, whether for wildlife habitat improvements or recreation facilities that we can build, such as trail shelters, other facilities, those really are all available within backcountry management areas.

In contrast, those types of activities, motorized, mechanized, structures, all of that whole suite of activity, management activities are prohibited in wilderness, through the Wilderness Act. So it's a real stark contrast between them. The recommended wilderness falls a little bit in between those two areas in that, again, as Steve mentioned before there's a spectrum within our management areas and it falls a little bit in between designated wilderness and our backcountry areas. So it still has some prohibitions on motorized transportation and some other things that aligned with wilderness in attempting to preserve that wilderness character through that recommended wilderness so that eventually as these plans move forward, and if it ever gets to Congress, they'll be able to consider that designation and the area will still retain that wilderness character for why it was designated in the first place.

Peter Fargo: Thanks, Dennis. It sounds like you covered a couple questions there and we got into the second question about why some backcountry areas are designated as motorized, whereas others are designated as non-motorized. And maybe you could just emphasize that one more time in case people didn't catch it.

Dennis Dougherty: I can grab that and that might be a little bit more of a distinction in the motorized and non-motorized between our backcountry areas themselves, the 3A and the 3B. And I think that's where that question was hitting and I'd be glad to grab that. Those two backcountry areas, as Steve mentioned earlier, they are backcountry areas really overlaying and overlap

with our Inventoried Roadless Areas. To a large extent, there's a one to one ratio. I mean they're nearly identical.

So in looking at those Inventoried Roadless Areas, we recognize in the Forest, as does everybody else, that some of those roadless areas actually do have roads in them and it's the way those areas were designated. So where those areas do have roads and have existing motorized use, we allocated that to a motorized backcountry or management area 3B as our motorized. Where in fact those Inventoried Roadless Areas truly do not have roads and they are non-motorized accessible. That is what we allocated to the management area 3A or non-motorized.

So there's a distinction within our backcountry areas that really aligns and recognizes existing uses on the landscape and those existing developments, and really allocates those lands based on those existing uses.

Sabrina Stadler: One of the things we talked about is that in the motorized backcountry, you may have campgrounds. You may be able to still, you know, there may even be paved roads going through them. There's still access. So it's kind of a misnomer to call it a roadless area because the conservation rule did. You know, there was actually roads and roads that are heavily used. So we're just trying to make a distinction so that people are aware that they're going to still be able to recreate in there, and get in there and have their primitive camping or dispersed camping, or even campgrounds they'll be able to drive into them as opposed to just hiking.

Peter Fargo: Thanks for clarifying, both of you. That was Sabrina there. I think some people did have an understanding or a question about where we were setting aside lands for non-motorized uses or motorized uses. But it sounds like the intention is really that we recognize the uses that are there for the motorized roads and trails that are there in the landscape.

Sabrina Stadler: And then something else that Dennis didn't mention is that, for example, when we're doing trail maintenance, in the wilderness we use a different technique. We use a lot of cross saws. We don't use chain saws, but in the backcountry areas, we would still be able to maintain the trails with the chain saws. Or there would be some firewood cutting and things like that where you wouldn't be able to do that in a wilderness area.

So there's still a lot of active use of those areas that will be the same as they've been basically, the same amount of access they've currently had.

Peter Fargo: Great. Thank you. So another question related to Inventoried Roadless Areas and backcountry areas is where there are additional lands without roads or motorized trails, and those areas extend beyond the current IRA boundaries, why do we not designate those backcountry as well?

Dennis Dougherty: It's a great question and in some part of the exercise, Steve mentioned in taking a look at our backcountry areas. And we do recognize that there are a lot of roadless and backcountry areas that are not officially designated as part of those Inventoried Roadless Areas. So we did deliberately include those within our backcountry area. We did try to align those boundaries to some extent with the IRA boundaries, the inventory roadless area boundaries, more for future project management. It makes it a lot easier knowing those boundaries are the same. But where it made sense on the landscape geographically, topographically, if there were large contiguous areas that we felt met that backcountry criterion and Desired Condition was something we felt important to recognize and to allocate to that management area type.

Peter Fargo: Great. Thank you. There's another question here that is not something that we had a chance to discuss, but I want to see if Dennis can take a stab at it. I think some folks are concerned that if we have IRAs designated as 3B, management area 3B, backcountry motorized, that we may not be providing the same ecological protections for those areas that's intended by the inventory roadless area or the roadless area conservation rule. Can you just discuss how that protection is provided or is different in 3B versus 3A?

Dennis Dougherty: Sure. There are some roads, as we recognize, in the Inventoried Roadless Areas. So in designating those as 3B, again, we're recognizing those existing uses and noting too that the density of development within those areas is -- in relation to the other parts of the Forest -- is very low. And that having a single road or two in a larger contiguous roadless area doesn't necessarily equate to ecological degradation. It may be a little fragmentation. It may impair that area a little bit and nor does it necessarily preclude its future consideration, say, for its eligibility in the wilderness preservation system.

But also recognizing that not all Inventoried Roadless Areas, that is not the intent as an interim step toward designated wilderness. The inventory roadless area is designated by the roadless area conservation rule. While it's in itself a portion of a conservation rule that established, again, over 58 million acres nationally in a land status that affords it additional prohibitions and some protections that will conserve those values of clean water, habitat refugia, a lot of number of things that they provide along with other primitive recreation uses that all sort of align with what wilderness does, to some extent, but not all inventory roadless area is necessarily going to be wilderness in the future. It is a conservation status in itself.

Peter Fargo: Great. Thanks for explaining.

Dennis Dougherty: You bet.

Peter Fargo: That gets us to our next category. I think we've covered a lot of the backcountry areas and the inventory roadless area questions. And the next category is the wildlife corridors. And Sabrina volunteered to answer this first question. Can the Forest Service create more wilderness areas, including wildlife corridors, to create refugia for climate challenged resources?

Sabrina Stadler: So the thing that -- the distinction that we need to make first is that the act of creating a wilderness area is not done by the Forest Service. The Forest Service can recommend wilderness, but wilderness is actually designated by Congress. And so we cannot undo that designation, nor can we actually put it into a designated status. That's only done by Congress. So, you know, whether in the future there is a decision to do that would not be something that the Forest Service necessarily made. It would be something Congress made.

In terms of the wilderness areas, you know, I think we're of the mindset, as Dennis even alluded to just in his previous answer, that the wilderness areas that we currently have in the Blues, coupled with all the Inventoried Roadless Areas and the wild and scenic rivers, and some of those other land allocations that provide greater protections, combined we think really help to lend themselves to this refugia concept or the wildlife corridor concept and the connectivity for wildlife. And so they won't be treated the same as other general Forests, for example. They won't be receiving as much timber harvest or they won't have new roads being built in them, things like that.

So those acts alone and the sort of kind of more passive restoration concepts that they -- that would be promoted in them would be, we think, providing a lot of that kind of landscape level protections. Now, another thing that we're also working on is within an actual project area being mindful of the needs of the wildlife that are currently within that wildlife -- I mean within that project area. So we will be taking into consideration the kind of the natural variation of the historic range of variability, we're calling it, for vegetation. So what it looked like historically, what kind of landscape patterns were there? And by doing so, we think that that's going to help create some of those open areas followed by some closed areas, say, for elk, so that they have forage areas, or there's that ability within the riparian areas and the denser forest for denser forest loving species to be able to use them as corridors.

So within the actual project design, we'll be carefully thinking about landscape patterns as well. So those things combined we think really help lend themselves better to the wildlife corridor concept than to specifically identify corridors where animals may or may not go. And there's so many different species that we'd be thinking about that we think that this would be a more comprehensive approach that is specific to the landscape needs.

Peter Fargo: Thank you. The second question is related: Is any thought being given to developing, constructing wildlife passageways, overpasses, underpasses on highways where wildlife crossings are common?

Sabrina Stadler: So in thinking through the answer to this, we don't really have specific objectives in the plan identified for wildlife over and underpasses, and when you really get down to brass tacks, we don't have a lot of interface with the 395 or the I-84 and those would be the major, I think, thoroughfares, where there would be quite enough travel and, you know, vehicle travel to really think that would be necessary. When you get down to it, there's very little interface with actual forest land base. Most of it's private. And anything that would happen there would have to be part of the federal highways and they would be the ones who would probably be working with the private landowners, particularly, or state, or tribes. Like the I-84, that's the main land owners. There's a very small interface. And I think we have the Blue Mountains Crossing there, where there's an underpass right now. So, you know, there are I guess a very few places where that would actually apply I think to the Forest or these Forests.

Peter Fargo: Thanks, Sabrina. So one more question we have under the wildlife corridors category is regarding elk. And I just wanted to ask in general where are we headed with our analysis or our planning related to elk and their habitat needs?

Sabrina Stadler: Right. So the past 1990s plans, some of them had actual land allocations, management areas specific to elk. And we found that that actually didn't work very well. That was actually one of the needs for change because basically, elk are a wide ranging species and they tend to take advantage of opportunities as they come. So say, for example, a new fire area, you might see them moving into there because it's better forage.

So what we decided would be a better approach would be to look at the -- their use on the landscape and to be protective of them where they are most sensitive. So for example, in winter, where we have winter range, we know that that can be a very stressful time for the elk. And so to try to minimize the disturbance so that they're not constantly being forced out of an area and into new areas to try to find forage, and that can be unsettling for elk to have to keep doing that when they're already very stressed. Another is during the summer when they are calving or having up there in the high elevations, there's the need for some security areas so that they can have the kind of lower density road network and higher cover areas in order to have their babies and to have that certain time of year where they're a little more sensitive during that time.

So we're going to be looking at those and trying to come up with some solutions. We've been trying to work with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. We'll also be talking to the tribes about the approach that we're taking. So right now, it's still in a state of flux really and we'll be -- it's one of those kind of hot button kind of wicked issues, as we like to call them, where we're really trying to figure out what's the best thing to maintain that very important resource on the landscape as far as their habitat, and their needs, and ensure their viability, but also make sure we have the necessary access and the things that people want also.

So there's push/pull here between elk and the science on elk, and what we're trying to do.

Peter Fargo: Thank you. So we've gone through a few categories now, wilderness, backcountry, and wildlife corridors. And before we move into the next section, we had a couple questions

come in from listeners. And I wanted to throw these out there and see who would like to respond. So first is just a clarification. When is the objection process or when do we expect that will begin?

Sabrina Stadler: So once we have the -- we'll be widely spreading the news that we have a final Environmental Impact Statement out and then objection. That will be when the objection process will begin. So as we publish that notice of availability for the Final Environmental Impact Statement and plan -- drop plans and drop Records of Decision -- then that will be in the Federal Register. That will begin the actual objection period. And that date is hinging on review of our final documents and getting a biological opinion.

So once those are completed, we'll get them out to the public as soon as we can right after that, and basically from there it'll start the objection process.

Peter Fargo: Great. So to be determined.

Sabrina Stadler: Yes, and again, it's a 60 day process to file your objection.

Peter Fargo: Second question that came in just now is will there be names given to these new Alternatives and will they be G and H, for example, and will these new Alternatives be considered "preferred" or what will we call them?

Sabrina Stadler: So out of the next two Alternatives being analyzed, the Regional Forester will select one Alternative. And so that will be the one that we write the draft Record of Decision and the Draft Plans will be based on, I'll say. And then as far as their letters are concerned, we don't have that quite identified yet. So we'll just figure that out soon. We don't have a label yet. The thing is that makes it complicated is that we have these ones that are eliminated from detailed study and that goes on through I don't know what letter it is. There's a lot of them. So to be sequential, we might bump everything down, or we might -- who knows. We haven't really figured that one out. We've been more concerned about getting the plans right at this point than the logistics of what the letter name will be.

Peter Fargo: So the term preferred sometimes comes up with those who have been involved in the comment period for the draft plan back in 2014. We had a Preferred Alternative identified

and at that time it was Alternative E. And now, we're moving away from preferred and toward a future Selected Alternative. Is that correct?

Sabrina Stadler: Yes, right, and the selection could involve a multiple aspects of different Alternatives, but there will be one Selected Alternative that will go forward from there.

Peter Fargo: Okay. Thank you. All right, well, we will continue to take breaks and attempt to answer questions as they come in. It looks like I have one more. Let me see if I can read it and interpret it for a moment. I think there's a question related to backcountry areas again and relationship to wilderness. And so that's -- how close could the management of 3B -- that's a backcountry motorized areas -- how close could that get to 3A wilderness in the future?

Sabrina Stadler: I'm going to rephrase it. I've been looking at this question. So what I think the question is asking is they were saying that when you compare the recommended wilderness to the backcountry areas, that that was not completely the -- they think that there's a high likelihood that those 3A non-motorized could become recommended wilderness in the future. I think that's what the point of the -- you know, again, that comes back to future decision makers. I mean, at this point, the decision for this plan period is the management areas that we're going to have in place. And in the future, should someone decide to make those calls that would be a different Regional Forester. That's the way I guess I would answer that at this point.

Steve Beverlin: And Inventoried Roadless Areas -- this is Steve Beverlin -- Inventoried Roadless Areas are, you know, the boundaries were defined under the inventory, the rule. And so those are fixed and were mandated by that rule to manage those areas for those specific purposes. And sometimes that means that they -- some meet wilderness criteria better than others and those may be ones that become recommended wilderness through our planning process. I think there's a couple examples of that and Alternatives in that plan right now.

And there's also other ones that don't. So they're still managed for the 3B, the backcountry motorized uses, or 3A backcountry non-motorized, and they don't have the criteria that actually raises them to a level to be recommended wilderness then management area 1A. So I think it just really is site-specific based on the Inventoried Roadless Areas on the ground. And I think the management area diversity of 1A, 3A, and 3B reflects the diversity of those areas. Hopefully that gets at that a little better.

Peter Fargo: Thanks. I'm glad you started talking because it's your turn to answer some other questions too. So our next category gets into some of those Travel Management related questions. We talked about designated routes before with the summary of the newsletter, taking that language out of the plans in general. And the next question related to that is, will the three Forests continue to pursue access management plans?

Steve Beverlin: So the answer is yes. So all National Forests are mandated by the National Travel Rule to complete Subpart A, the minimal road system analysis, Subpart B, the designation of roads, trails, and areas, and Subpart C, the designation of areas or trails for over-the-snow vehicle use. Okay, so every Forest in Region six, Washington and Oregon, has completed Subpart A, that minimal road system designation. So that's complete. Subpart B is complete for the Umatilla National Forest and they're I think revising their motor vehicle use map for the second time or third time possibly. And so they've been going through that process. The Malheur and the Wallowa-Whitman National Forests have not completed Subpart B and so we will complete that per the Regional Forester's agreement, after the fourth plan revision is final.

That doesn't mean, however, that we're not addressing access issues in our site-specific analysis, and we continue to do so. So we're in the meantime, before the Forest Plan revision is final, we're addressing issues that way.

Peter Fargo: So is it safe to say that we do not need to have a Travel Management Subpart B process to address access issues on the ground?

Steve Beverlin: I think it's safe to say that the Regional Forester has deferred the Subpart B planning process on the Malheur and the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. And again, Subpart B is the designation of roads, trails, and areas for motorized use. So the Regional Forester has deferred that on the Malheur and the Wallowa-Whitman until the Forest Plan revision is final. That's the safe thing to say and accurate.

Peter Fargo: Another question on the access topic is how does the revised land management plan address public access in terms of the plan components? And another way to think of that question is,

perhaps, how is the Forest -- how are the Forest Plans different from Travel Management and then how do they address access in their own right?

Sabrina Stadler: Right, okay. So the Forest Plan is a guidance document. It's a strategic document. It is a way to help envision where we want to take the Forest into the future. And the plan components that are specific to roads, and trails, and road-related access are basically the inputs that would go into the Travel Management process. So when they're going through, say, the Subpart B, which is that designation of a motorized vehicle use map and the open areas to motorize travel, that would inform the decision to do that using -- they would use the Forest Plans to inform that.

So for example, some of these management area calls, like, what's a suitable use in those management areas. So we'll be looking to the part where we've identified where summer motor vehicle use is allowed or winter motor vehicle use for when they're talking about the Subpart C, OS, over snow vehicle analysis. So those -- that -- those plan components that I think probably most interface with the Travel Management rule are the roads and trails Desired Conditions. There's some associated guidelines that are protective of aquatic riparian areas. There's objectives where we basically identify the area -- the number of roads or culverts that we'll be improving, the hydrologic connectivity, or decreasing the amount of hydrologic connectivity with those, which is basically to say we'll be trying to address sediment issues, right-sizing culverts, maybe doing out sloping if there is a need. Certain water -- roads that are too close to the water source, are right along the water source may need to be decommissioned. It depends on the needs of the landscape as they're entering into them. But those objectives are identified.

And then each of these management areas has a Desired Condition. And so not only is there suitable uses for those management areas, but there's also the Desired Conditions. And some of the Desired Conditions are to have it be, like, for example, the backcountry non-motorized would be to not have more new motorized trails. So not only -- even if it's in an Inventoried Roadless Area, if it's a non-motorized backcountry area, the Desired Condition would still be linked to not adding more motorized trails to that area. So we'll be looking to those as we're designing projects and as we're doing restoration work, and we'll be doing those during the Travel Management process.

So we kind of look at it like the Forest Plan is like a large umbrella, and then all the projects fall underneath that. So Travel Management is a project level, site-specific project, even though it's Forest wide and it falls under the umbrella of the Forest Plan.

Peter Fargo: Thank you.

Steve Beverlin: And Peter, before the next question, I'll jump in real quick and Sabrina I think highlighted really well that the Forest Plan doesn't directly change current uses until site-specific NEPA analysis is done. So some of that site-specific NEPA analysis for Travel Management is done in Hells Canyon National Recreation Area already. I think there's another area on the Wallowa-Whitman, is it Sled Springs, that has some specific -- through litigation, there's some specific Travel Management was done. And there's some specific project areas on the Malheur and Umatilla of course has their whole Forest done. So that's kind of how that all fits together. I just wanted to clarify that a little bit.

Sabrina Stadler: Right. So the Forest Plan does not close roads and a lot of people have thought that by signing this decision they're going to close roads.

((Crosstalk))

Steve Beverlin: Or open roads. It doesn't do any of that.

Sabrina Stadler: It doesn't do any of that site-specific work. That'll be done post decision and then that would have its own decision.

Peter Fargo: Thank you for that. So we have another question here and I'm going to point to Steve on this one. Can the Forest Service use funds more efficiently and leverage or supplement road maintenance, for example, by allowing users to maintain roads, by charging tolls for paved roads, by working with motorized recreationists and other groups to obtain grants, or using the income from timber harvests? How can we get the work done if we can't do it on our own?

Steve Beverlin: Thanks, Peter. So the short answer is yes. I think that all Forests across the nation are looking to be more efficient at utilizing the funds they get from Congress to the best extent possible,

and leveraging those funds again to the broadest effect on the ground. And all of those things talked about user maintenance, potential fees or tolls, utilizing counties, for example. Those are all options for us to help maintain the access for the public's use and enjoyment of the National Forest.

Peter Fargo: Thank you. Okay, here's a question for Dennis and we had the aviation community involved in a number of our public meetings back in 2015. And regarding aviation, has the planning team had a chance to review the memorandum of understanding that was provided to us during the public meetings concerning Forest Service planning and aviation?

Dennis Dougherty: Yes, we did. It was delightful to see that many recreational aviators at our public meetings through 2015. It was really refreshing to catch another user group that otherwise may not always get recognized and get the recognition of their use. It's a very vocal, well organized group. They actually influenced the 2012, the National 2012 Planning Rule to recognize recreational aviation as a legitimate use of these Forests. They have a long history of maintaining and partnering with the Forest with numerous backcountry areas throughout the Western U.S. certainly. And that partnership was really recently recognized through that memorandum of understanding with the Forests.

So really kind of goes back to even the last question Steve mentioned about, you know, getting creative for how we get our work done. Certainly, a partner like the recreation aviation foundation has been a great partner to not only maintain these air strips, but to do a lot of that work that we need to do in the backcountry maybe maintaining backcountry facility, trash haul outs, bag haul operations. Certainly, in our search and rescue, and fire operations, aviation is instrumental.

So it was great to see them at the meetings and to provide that info. We certainly have inserted that parallel language into this plan and futuring that out a little more, the actual site-specific analysis for each of the backcountry air strips as both Steven and Sabrina mentioned earlier, falls under that site-specific decision where if it is subsequent to the plan decision. So the plan recognizes that it is a legitimate use and in the future when we look to the National Forest transportation system, which is really where that air strips land within the agency, they'll certainly take a good, hard look at those individual air strips and come up with

different treatments for them at that point. But certainly, in the plan, we recognize and applaud that partnership.

Peter Fargo: Thanks, Dennis. This is a question related to one that came up previously for Steve. Is the Forest Service maintaining the current levels of access and not placing any restrictions on access under these new Forest Plans? And this person who asked the question identified a number of reasons for that desire, including the benefit to local businesses and a broad range of activities, including hunting, fishing, cycling, camping, et cetera on the Forest related to access.

Steve Beverlin: Thanks, Peter. So as we mentioned before, the Forest Plan revision doesn't change current uses. So your existing access until those uses are modified by future site-specific analysis and decision-making, I guess period. That's the short answer to it. The Forest -- all three Forests definitely recognize the value of forest access for people to access areas to enjoy solitude, for people to just camp, for the whole host of reasons that people want to access them. Some that were listed for mining, for hiking, firewood gathering, photography, bird watching, wildlife watching. All those things are recognized valid uses that we want to have continue on the Forest.

So the Forest Plan revision allocates and really kind of places management areas across the Forest where we believe the area can be managed for suitable uses within each one of those. And it's those site-specific analysis that follow-up after the Forest Plan revision is final that would designate further roads that would be closed, or open, or whatever the values may be.

Peter Fargo: Thank you. I'm going to bounce to Sabrina for another question on the access topic. Can the Forest Service provide scientific justifications regarding how motorized uses on trails or on dirt roads, or paved roads may affect wildlife, and how do we do that through the planning process? Is that part of the planning process or no?

Sabrina Stadler: Well, I think the Forest is required to use the best available science in our Forest Plans, as well as in our effects analysis. And so, you know, when we're analyzing Alternatives, we try to weigh in the balance with the best available science to help the decision makers be informed on the effects their decision have on different wildlife species, or plants, animals, birds, all the different potential effects, the soil, water quality. So as we're going through this

process, we're always mindful of that when we're doing what -- that portion of the planning, which is the Environmental Impact Statement where we compare the Alternatives to one another and try to weigh in on which -- what the effects are of our potential plan components.

But then in also developing the plan components, we're doing our best to be very nimble in using the best available science. We're actively seeking out information from our collaborative partners, our cooperators, the states, the tribes, working with them, having them review, working with the Pacific Northwest Research Station. You know, so we're very aware of the desire to have plans that are both able to address the best available science, but also understanding that we have a social and economic responsibility as well, as we provide the multiple use mandate.

So in terms of the overall approach, you know, I think it's one of trying to balance all the needs, looking at what the needs of wildlife are, looking at what the needs of all the resources that we benefit.

Peter Fargo: Thanks, Sabrina. Well, folks, we're at 6:30 and we don't want to take up your entire evening, although we love talking about Forest Planning. Not everybody likes to listen to it on a school night. So we respect that. With that, I just want to say thank you for all the questions that folks sent in, in advance, and if we did not get to your question today, we will hopefully address it over the coming weeks and months. We plan to do more of these calls. We plan to have more newsletters and we're also available via email. You have our email address. So please stay in touch and stay tuned for more updates. We'll be focusing on livestock grazing in the next newsletter. We hope to have it out in late August and at that point, we'll have another conference call so we can describe some of the updates there.

And I would also point you, if you haven't had a chance to review the current newsletters, we had one come out in April and the most recent one that we discussed here came out in June. And they're both on the Forest Plan revision website, which is www.fs.usda.gov/goto/bluemountainsplanrevision. And you can also Google or use your favorite search tool to find the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision. Type in Forest Service in the search engine and you'll get to our home page, and just look along the right column for those links to the newsletters.

So with that, I want to give it back to Steve. Any parting words?

Steve Beverlin: I just appreciate the engagement. We're really trying to be engaging with everyone and share, and be open, and transparent about where we are in the process and some of the issues we're trying to resolve. So I just appreciate everybody sticking with us. And we need your questions, we need your input, and your continued help to make this plan work for everybody.

Peter Fargo: Thank you all for your time. We'll look forward to seeing you again soon. Have a good evening.

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